

Former Independence Party chairwoman sentenced to jail time

By dskriloff on March 1, 2012 · 0 Comments

Debra Ortutay

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Debra Ortutay of Valley Cottage was sentenced on Monday to four months in jail. The former Rockland Independence Party chairwoman, whose son-in-law is county legislator Frank Sparaco (Republican) of Clarkstown, admitted to lying to a grand jury who was investigating improprieties involving the signing of petitions for the party's ballot line during the Assembly race between Sparaco and Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski in 2010. In December, Ortutay admitted to signing the petitions and falsely claiming that she had witnessed 12 Rockland Independence Party voters signing the documents.

She also later told the same story about witnessing the signatures before a grand jury. Ortutay began her four-month sentence in the Rockland County Jail immediately after being sentenced at the Rockland County Courthouse by Supreme Court Justice Joseph C. Teresi, from Albany. If she shows good behavior, Ortutay could serve less than four months in jail. After she is released, she will be on probation and answer to a probation officer for the following five years. If she is ever again convicted of a felony, she could receive a longer sentence. In addition, Ortutay pleaded guilty to second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument and first-degree offering a false instrument for filing. And in addition to the three felony charges, she also pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of violating state election law.

Ortutay was represented in court by Bronx GOP Chairman Jay Savino, who is a practicing attorney and friends with her son-in-law Sparaco as well as Rockland GOP chair Vinny Reda. Incidentally it's been rumored that Savino is in line to be the next Rockland County GOP chair as apparently he owns a home in the county. Reda, who is over 75 years old, has run the Rockland GOP for almost 20 years.

In 2010 Sparaco led the effort to have his mother-in-law elected as Independence Party chairwoman, replacing longtime chair Marsha Coopersmith, whom he'd accused of corruption and patronage. One of Sparaco's complaints about the old Independence Party boss Coopersmith was that she used her influence to gain a cozy "no-show" job in Clarkstown that paid over \$150,000 a year including benefits and pension. Curiously, with Coopersmith out of the political powerbroker picture, Clarkstown lawmakers installed none other than Jay Savino in her position, albeit at about half the rate of pay.

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